

Tongues and Interpretation (Part 1)

Note: Please refer back to Growing Strong 2 and 3 for a general overview of speaking in tongues.

Definition

Speaking in tongues is a way of speaking directly to God, not to other people. Paul writes in **1 Corin. 14: 2** *'One who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God.'* Sometimes it is a known human tongue, but, at other times it is referred to as a 'heavenly language'. It is given to the speaker by the Holy Spirit. What is spoken is not understood by the speaker, unless he/she is also given the interpretation. The gift is under the control of the speaker so he is responsible to see that it is used properly and what is written in God's Word about this will help to enable proper use of the gift.

Tongues in private prayer

Tongues is not only part of the initial evidence of the receiving of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, but, is also continually available to help build up the individual spiritually.

Tongues in public

Paul writes in **1 Corin. 12: 10** about the various Gifts given to individuals, *'.....to another various kinds of tongues.'* When he implies that only some will receive this gift, he is not referring to its use in private prayer, but, is saying that not all who have received the gift and use it privately, will necessarily use it in a public assembly.

Preaching/Teaching

Tongues is not a preaching or teaching gift and does not benefit the congregation unless there is an interpretation of what has been said.

Why does God use tongues?

Tongues are extremely powerful; this is because it is not the individual who is speaking, but the Holy Spirit Himself speaking through the individual. The purpose of the use of the gift in a service is to build up the body of Christ. When someone has given an utterance in tongues, (ie. Verbally so that the rest of the congregation can hear) there are two things that usually occur. The first is that members of the congregation who have been baptized in the Spirit, feel a sort of jump in their spirits. This is known as a 'quickenings'. There is often a sudden urge to want to pray in tongues and join in praising and worshipping God.

The second thing that happens is that this quickening releases other Spiritual Gifts, particularly the gift of prophecy, when God speaks to the congregation through an individual. This does not need an interpretation because it will be in the general language that is being used in the service.

Interpretation of tongues

When something has been spoken in tongues there needs to be an interpretation of what has been said for the benefit of the congregation. The interpretation is not normally an actual word for word translation, but is an interpretation giving the gist of what has been said. It does not depend on linguistic ability as it is given by the Holy Spirit. The two may not necessarily be of the same length. This can depend on the interpreter making sure that the meaning of what has been said is explained more clearly. It also of course, to a certain extent, depends on the personality and individual style of the

interpreter. Very occasionally it is a word for word translation that is verified by someone present in the congregation who can speak the language that has been used.

Praying for interpretation

In our private prayer times there is no need for interpretation as no-one is listening in apart from God and He already knows what we are saying! There is no reason however, that we cannot pray for the interpretation of our own prayers. If we get into the habit of sometimes doing this, then it will be easier for us to recognize and be prepared when God wishes to use us in this way in a public situation. It is normally a different person whom God uses for the interpretation. If no-one gives this then in the Bible Paul encourages us to pray for the power to interpret what we have said. There is always someone to whom God has given the interpretation, yet some do not find it easy to step out and use the gifts that they have been given so there are times when the interpretation is omitted.

Receiving interpretation

Tongues and interpretation work together and are dependent on each other. People receive interpretation in different ways. Often the person may only receive the first sentence and have to speak that out before God gives them more. If they wait for more before saying anything then maybe nothing happens! It takes faith to go forward in the use of the Gifts and the Church can miss out through a lack of faith and belief in what has been received. Some people get a picture or written words. Others may not be given exact words but a general idea as to what has been spoken.

Number of utterances

There needs to be a balance in services and none should be taken over by the use of any of the gifts. Paul limits the number of utterances in tongues to three, which are not spoken simultaneously.

1 Corin. 14: 27 – 28 *'If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at most three, each in turn....'*

If something further needs to be spoken, then it is up to one of those who have already spoken, not a fourth person. Paul then goes on to say in v. 27, *'....let one interpret'*, implying that the same person be the interpreter.

Interpretation not needed

There are times when an interpretation is not needed. I have seen occasions when a person has suddenly burst into singing in tongues, which was so obviously praise that no interpretation was needed.

Sometimes the person leading the service will encourage the congregation to pray collectively for a few minutes, saying for example, "Pray in a heavenly language if you are able." Since members will be praying simultaneously and also differently, then no interpretation would take place.

Singing in tongues

One of the most beautiful sounds I have ever heard is when a congregation sings in tongues during a time of worship. They were not singing a known tune of a hymn or chorus but spontaneously singing in their own God-given tongue for about five minutes. The chances of 20 – 30 people all freely singing any musical note that they felt led to sing and all harmonize, must be billions to one. I would say that it is one of the most convincing moments that tongues is of the Holy Spirit because of the impossibility of such a thing as this happening naturally through our own abilities. What an amazing God we have!